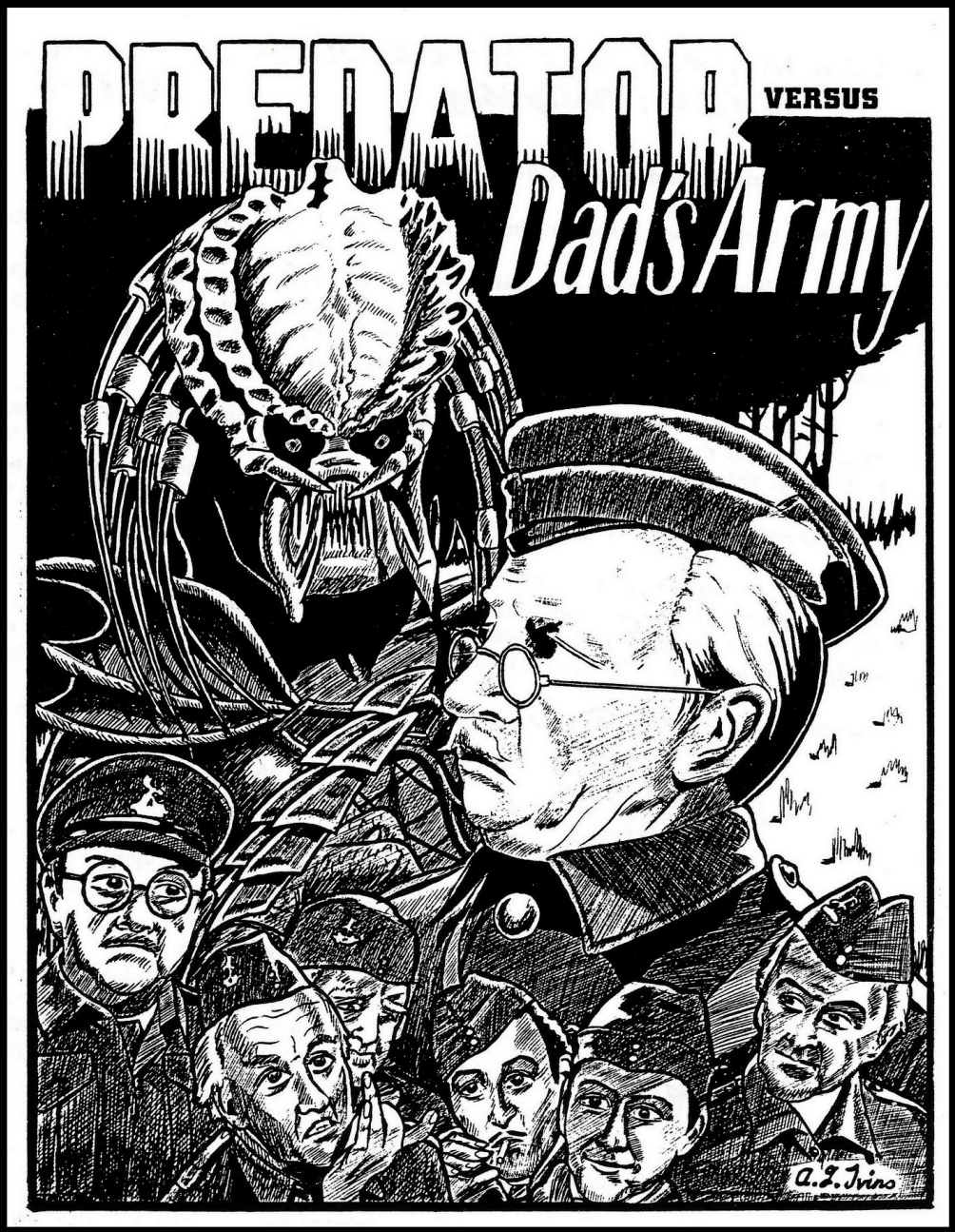
IT CAME FROM BEYOND THE STARS

TO A VIOLENT, WAR-TORN PLANET

SEARCHIMG FOR WARRIORS AND THE GLORY OF THE HUNT

IT FOUND THE WALMINGTON ON SEA HOME GUARD PLATOON



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by PHILIP MAY

The following is a story of the Walmington-on-Sea Home Guard platoon during World War II. It has been edited from recently discovered documents.

Decide for yourself whether it is true . . .

CAPTAIN MAINWARING'S JOURNAL

Major General Fullard decided that Friston Forest, within walking distance of the River Cuckmere, would be the site of our new training exercise. Nearby, along with ancient long barrows, is the Long Man. He is the ancient and giant chalk figure of a man holding two large poles, cut into the steep north slope of the Windover Hill.

We drove up in Jones' van. As ever, it broke down. For a variety of reasons, we were already a day late, so we decided to pitch our tents in the churchyard of the nearby Priory, by the thousand-year old yew tree. It is rumoured that, in ancient times, devil worship and pagan rituals were carried out there. I don't believe any of that rubbish, of course.

In the middle of the night, I awoke with a start. A terrifying black figure stood over me. Startled, I put my glasses on. It was only Hodges, the ARP warden, who was also due to take part in the exercise.

"Put that light out!" he exclaimed. Does he ever say anything else? I swear he is a Nazi spy who follows my every move.

"What light?" I demanded of him. By now, the rest of my platoon was waking up.

"That light!" said Hodges, grabbing my hand and pointing at the night sky. "I know your men are responsible. Ruddy hooligans - don't you know there's a war on!"

I noticed that all my men were looking up into the sky, so I did too. I will never forget the sight of that glowing disc flying through the sky. For an instant, it hovered over our heads. I could hear no sound, and a chill ran down my spine. I was reminded of those 'foo fighters' the Yanks are always talking about

"It's an optical illusion," I declared, not convincing myself at all. "A lighthouse, the Blitz, that sort of thing."

By now, Hodges' face was pale. He climbed on his bike, which was strangely stiff. Clearly he'd realised we were not to blame for the strange light. He waved at us, and was off, not wanting to hang around. He cursed something about being late for the exercise.

"We're doomed!" declared Frazer, his rolling eyes wide and his Scottish accent thick. "Doomed, I tell ye! Have ye no heard the legends?"

"What legends might those be?" asked Walker, not worried at all, and puffing on a cigarette.

"They say Herne the Hunter still walks these parts, seeking out prey. That's what the figure on yon hill is. And then there's the legend of Peredur . . ."

"Peredur?" I asked. The name sounded strangely familiar. I then cursed myself for allowing myself to be caught up in this nonsense.

"In medieval times, there was a French knight named Peredur," Frazer began. "He came upon nearby Burlough Castle. It was completely empty, apart from a chessboard. The pieces played by themselves, as if moved by an invisible hand. Peredur took sides and lost. A mysterious maiden appeared and punished him. The knight was sent to Windover Long Mound. He recited a spell and a hideous figure - The Predator - appeared."

"What did he look like?" asked Pike. I could tell he was both nervous and excited.

"Some say The Predator was a wild black man," replied Frazer. Others say he was a dragon. But most say The Predator was taller than the tallest man, had the face of a scorpion, and could vanish into thin air!"

"My sister Dolly told me this story," said Godfrey. "Peredur fought The Predator and won. Burlough Castle crumbled into dust, and The Predator disappeared back into the mound."

"Where he still lurks today, waiting for somebody new to fight." Frazer finished his story, and looked around. There was an uneasy silence.

"Uncle Arthur, I'm scared!" Pike broke the silence, and wrapped his scarf tighter around himself.

"Would you mind awfully if we got back to sleep?" Wilson yawned. He was clearly unimpressed by the ghost story.

I noticed that Corporal Jones had been unusually quiet since he woke up. I walked up to him.

"Permission to speak, Sir?" he asked.

"Granted," I sighed.

"It's that light," he explained, squinting into the sky. "I've seen it before. When I was fighting the fuzzy-wuzzies in the Sudan . . ."

PRIVATE GODFREY'S LETTER

Next morning, we arrived at Lullington Church, allegedly the base for the exercise. Imagine our surprise, my dear sister, when we found it to be completely empty. Not a soul was in sight. Not a sound pierced the air. I must say that, combined with the previous night's events, it felt rather spooky.

"It's meant to be empty," Captain Mainwaring explained. "It's all part of the exercise. They're waiting in the forest, lying in ambush. Come on men, let's show them!"

And so we split up into parties of two, intending to search the forest. I was to go with Private Smith. I must admit that I felt nervous. My bladder was even weaker than normal, and I had the strange feeling we were being followed.

Needing a rest, Private Smith and I found a nice little clearing. I took out my flask of tea, and those delicious upside-down cakes my other sister Dolly made me. Lovely and moist they are. You do have the recipe, don't you? Anyway, I needed to be 'excused' once more, and walked out of the clearing into the forest. I do wish they would build conveniences in these places.

Suddenly, I heard a terrible, blood-curdling scream. Rushing back to the clearing, I found Private Smith - dead! His head had been cut off. Oh, how sad! He was such a pleasant fellow.

I then became aware of the sound of breathing. There was nobody in the clearing, though I thought I could see a 'rippling' in the air - like a heat haze. And then I heard a voice. A terrible, rasping voice. Was this The Predator that Frazer spoke off?

"Excused," said the voice. The rippling in the air vanished. I'm ashamed that my soldier's courage deserted me, and I fainted . . .

PRIVATE FRAZER'S DIARY

I always knew we'd be doomed one day. That jumped-up bank manager Mainwaring can't cope with real battle. It's about time he retired, and let me take over the platoon. Today's exercise was the last straw. Oh, he claims it shows we're heroes. But I know different . . .

Corporal Jones and I were walking through the forest. We'd fallen behind when I became aware of the smell of blood. And a dripping sound. Drip, drip, drip. I looked up into the trees . . .

Bodies! Dozens of them, all dead. Heads cut off, hearts ripped out. You name it, it was there. I spotted that old fool Jones having to steady himself. God, he is *so* doddery! He's so old, I swear it's the Napoleonic wars he fought in, not the Sudan.

"Not again!" he exclaimed. "It's happening all over again!"

I asked him what he meant.

"Many years ago," he replied, "a whole platoon were wiped out, just like that!" He pointed at the trees. "We blamed the fuzzy-wuzzies, of course. Had a good old scrap over it. But then we heard the same thing had happened to them."

"I told ye - it's The Predator!" I rubbed my hands with glee. "At last, a good fight!"

"And then, one night," continued Jones, "I saw a light in the sky. Like last night. Half an hour later, I heard a terrible breathing sound. I rammed my bayonet in its direction. Next morning, there was nobody there!"

"The Predator visits us in times of war! Ever since medieval times!" I rolled my eyes and raised my voice, but Jones did not hear. He was too wrapped up in the past. As ever.

"They don't like it up 'em, Frazer! They *do not* like it up 'em!"

SERGEANT WILSON'S LETTER

Spot of excitement for once last week, brother . . .

I was walking through Friston Forest with Mainwaring, when we ran into Walker and Frank. Seems poor Pike was scared, and wanted to be in a larger group, so we joined them . . .

A short while later, we came across bodies in the trees. Good God, I have never seen so much blood!

Naturally, poor Frank was sick on sight.

"Terribly sorry, Uncle Arthur!" he apologised.

Before I had a chance to say it was alright, Mainwaring interrupted. "Pike, you stupid boy. Don't you have the stomach for battle? There'll be worse sights than this the day the balloon goes up!"

"Sir," I interjected. "Perhaps this *is* the balloon going up!"

"Wait a minute," said Mainwaring. "I know what this really is. The exercise itself! That's all make-up and acting, like those stupid Hollywood pictures."

"Yeah, I took Mavis to see one of them last week," replied Walker, puffing away. "FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE WOLFMAN. Didn't watch much of it, of course." He smiled.

"They look dead to me!" Frank was on the verge of panic. "Mum'll be awful worried, Uncle Arthur!"

At this point, we heard strange cries emanating from the trees. We crouched down immediately, waiting for the enemy. Then we actually heard what the cries were.

"The Martians are coming!"

"Good Lord - it's that damn bank clerk!"

And other, slightly more . . . colourful variations. It was none other than Hodges and Major General Fullard.

We waited until they were in our clearing. Then we jumped up, and startled them. I noticed that Fullard was wounded, bleeding a lot.

"Thank God!" Hodges exclaimed. "It's only you. I thought it was those blasted Martians again."

"Martians?" Mainwaring barked. "What on Earth are you blabbering on about!"

"Not on Earth - on Mars!" Hodges exclaimed. "I've read me H. G. Wells. It's those blasted Martians come for us at last! Remember that light we saw last night."

"From Mars? I've never heard such nonsense," replied Mainwaring in a patronising tone.

"Think what you like, but we've seen them. Haven't we, Major General?"

Fullard spoke up for the first time. His voice was weak, and he was clearly in pain and shock. "I was late for this

exercise too. Important briefing at the last minute. When I got here, the forest was deserted. Except for Hodges here."

"We were exploring the forest," said Hodges, "when we found all these bodies. And then, in a clearing we saw *it* - the Martian!"

"It appeared out of thin air," added Fullard. "In all my years in the Army, I have never seen anything like it. The shape of a man, but much taller. And its face! Horrible it was - just like a . . ."

"A scorpion, perhaps?" I asked, recalling Frazer's ghost story from the night before.

"That's it!" exclaimed Hodges, shivering. "The face of a scorpion! It saw us, walked towards us. We were frozen to the spot in fear; could see right into its eyes. And then it laughed. A horrible, inhuman laugh!"

"It threw some kind of discus at me. Hit me in the stomach, as you can see. Then it vanished again," said Fullard. "But we could see a 'heat-haze' moving through the trees. It had spared us, and become invisible!"

"Invisible? Sounds like that Claude Rains film you took me to see, Uncle Arthur." Frank's face was increasingly pale. I felt sure he was going to faint.

"Invisible?" asked Mainwaring. "Sounds like a typical shabby Nazi trick to me. Just so we can't see them sneak up on us."

"Oh, I wish it was a Nazi!" exclaimed Hodges. "At least they're human. Not Martians wanting to drink our blood!"

"Martians?" asked Walker, suddenly interested. "Hey, I could do some business with them. Get us some decent Martian food, drink, and fags. Bet they ain't got rationing on Mars."

"Don't be so ridiculous," continued Mainwaring. "The blasted Nazis have invaded us with a new secret weapon. And they're wearing Halloween costumes to scare those of us that are gullible. Come on, men - we'll show them!"

"Go on without me!" Fullard collapsed again. The wounds must have been worse than they looked. He pulled Mainwaring closer. "I've always thought you were just a damn bank clerk. Perhaps this is the day you become a soldier. Get the Martians for me!" His eyes closed, and his body slumped to the ground. He was dead.

And with that, the exceptionally narrow-minded Mainwaring led us further into the forest. Hodges was constantly looking behind himself . . .

PRIVATE FRAZER'S DIARY

Jones and I had made our way to one of those long barrows. There we saw an amazing sight. Some kind of aircraft, the size of Jones' lorry. It shimmered into existence out of thin air, along with an exceptionally tall figure: The Predator!

He took off his helmet, and I saw the terrible scorpion's face spoken of in legend.

Jones nearly had a heart attack, and began jabbing his bayonet into the air. He was about to start screaming "They don't like it up 'em!", but I put my hand over his mouth.

"Shut up, will ye!" I whispered. "Do ye want The Predator to hear us?" I put my best doom-laden voice on.

"Permission to speak, Frazer?" mumbled Jones.

I released his mouth.

"What we need is a plan of attack!" he declared enthusiastically.

"What do ye have in mind?" I sighed. I noticed he was staring at a nearby tree . . .

CAPTAIN MAINWARING'S JOURNAL

There was no sign of any Martians or Nazis as we carried on through the forest, Hodges tailing behind us. The air was still. Not a bird sang, and the sky seemed darker somehow. Suddenly there was a rustling in the bushes. I whirled round and aimed my pistol.

"Captain Mainwaring!" exclaimed Private Godfrey as he walked towards me "How awfully nice it is to see you again."

"Godfrey!" I exclaimed. I then lowered my pistol, but remained alert. "Where the hell have you been?"

"Don't tell me," interrupted Walker. "An invisible Martian leapt out of the trees and attacked you, right?"

"Well, yes. How did you know?" A smile tried to cross Godfrey's baby-like face, but failed. The poor man was awfully upset.

"Just guessed, that's all." Walker stubbed his cigarette out on a nearby tree trunk. "Here, where's Smith? He still owes me a fiver from last week."

"That's just what I was going to tell you," replied Godfrey. "He's dead."

Pike chose this moment to be sick again, and he burst into tears.

"Now, now, Frank. Everything's going to be all right," said Wilson as he rushed over to comfort him. I stepped over to them.

"Pike, you stupid boy!" I exclaimed. "You're going to have to get used to a lot more than this in the years ahead. This war won't be won by behaving like pansies."

I thought that was good, stirring man's talk. Pike obviously didn't, because his sobbing got worse.

"Little baby!" exclaimed Hodges, looking at Frank. "First sign of trouble, and he starts bawling. Fat lot of good he'll be in the army."

"Now, look here!" I declared. "Whether it's Martians or Nazis, we won't defeat them by shouting and crying. What we need is a plan. Now, I suggest- "

"Actually, Sir," interrupted Wilson. "If they have a base, perhaps it's near one of those long barrows . . ."

PRIVATE FRAZER'S DIARY

Why was it my misfortune to be teamed up with that stupid old fool Jones? When faced with the terrible threat of The Predator, what does he do but disguise himself as a tree!

He thought this was the perfect camouflage, and would allow him to run into the strange aircraft unseen. There, he would keep The Predator at bay while I too entered the craft and learned how to fly it! It didn't stand a chance in Hell of succeeding.

CAPTAIN MAINWARING'S JOURNAL

Our trek to the long barrow was uninterrupted. When there, we saw what must have been the 'foo fighter' from the previous night.

Suddenly a tree began to run inside it, exclaiming "Charge!" in the voice of Corporal Jones. I quickly guessed it was the butcher in one of his 'ingenious' disguises.

A few seconds later, he was followed by Private Frazer. For a second, all was still, then they both came flying out of the foo fighter.

"We're doomed!" said Frazer as he ran towards us.

Meanwhile, Jones' head hit an oak tree, and he slumped to the ground.

I quickly ran to him, and was pleased to see he was not hurt, just stunned. His mouth stirred.

"Permission to speak, Sir?"

"Granted," I said.

"They don't like it up 'em, Sir! They *do not* like it up 'em!" Jones stood up and saluted. "Permission to come back on duty, Sir?"

I nodded, then saw that the door of the foo fighter was closing. Hearing a strange humming sound fill the air, I beckoned to the others, and we entered.

The inside of the foo fighter was metal. On the floor lay the shattered remnants of Jones' tree. A humming sound filled the air. There were four walls, and shelves covered three of them. On them were stuffed heads, trophies I assume. Most of them were of bizarre animals, none of which I recognised.

But my stomach churned when I saw human heads, one of which belonged to Private Smith. Is there no depth to which the Nazis will not sink?

The fourth wall appeared to be taken up by a huge television screen, and what I took to be the flight controls. I spotted a fuzziness in the air, like a heat haze . . .

The Nazi appeared! He must have taken off his 'invisibility belt', or whatever the blasted new German contraption is. He was wearing a helmet, and holding a discus of some sort.

He began laughing as he took his helmet off. The horrible face of a giant scorpion was revealed. Behind me, Pike fainted. Stupid boy - can't he recognise a Halloween mask when he sees one?

"*A good game,*" rasped the Nazi, in a voice that did not sound German. "*But over now.*"

Behind us, the foo fighter's door opened. The Nazi put down his discus.

"*Shall go to the Delta Quadrant,*" said the disguised German. "*The Borg are better sport.*" Must have been a Nazi code message. For the life of me, I could not work out what he meant.

He beckoned us outside. None of us wanted to argue with him.

We quickly met up with the rest of my platoon. Luckily, none of them were hurt.

PRIVATE FRAZER'S DIARY

The aircraft hovered over our heads for a moment, then flew off. I know what the truth was. For all its murderous tendencies, The Predator is an honourable creature. It would not fight old fools like us.

Mainwaring has a different idea, of course. Keeps boasting how we defeated a German spy. At Fullard's funeral, he said that the Major General died in battle.

CAPTAIN MAINWARING'S JOURNAL

Funny day today, exactly a week after that nasty business in Friston Forest. Two American men in black suits turned up in the bank. One of them was a heavy smoker. The other was a coloured, bearded man.

They quoted the Official Secrets Act and ordered me to hide all records of the Friston Forest incident in my bank vault - *'Not to be opened for fifty years'*.

That done, I retired to the Red Lion for a drink. Bumped into the strangest chap - clearly drunk, he was. Short, Scottish, and wearing a sweater covered with question marks. He was with a young, brown-haired girl. No doubt he is some kind of rogue who delights in seducing young women. A bit like Sergeant Wilson, really.

He took great interest in my story of Friston Forest. Telling me to keep an open mind, he handed me an old newspaper.

"Well, we must be off then," he said. I didn't learn his name. "It's been nice meeting you, Captain Mainwaring. Ace and I are off to Opus 1 now. By the way, don't go to Whitby next year."

"Why?" I asked. "Do you think I'll run into Dracula?"

"Something like that," he replied. Picking his hat up, he and the girl left. I decided to look at the old newspaper.

It was *The Times* and, to my disbelief, dated May 1945 - several years in the future! It said that the Allies had won the war!

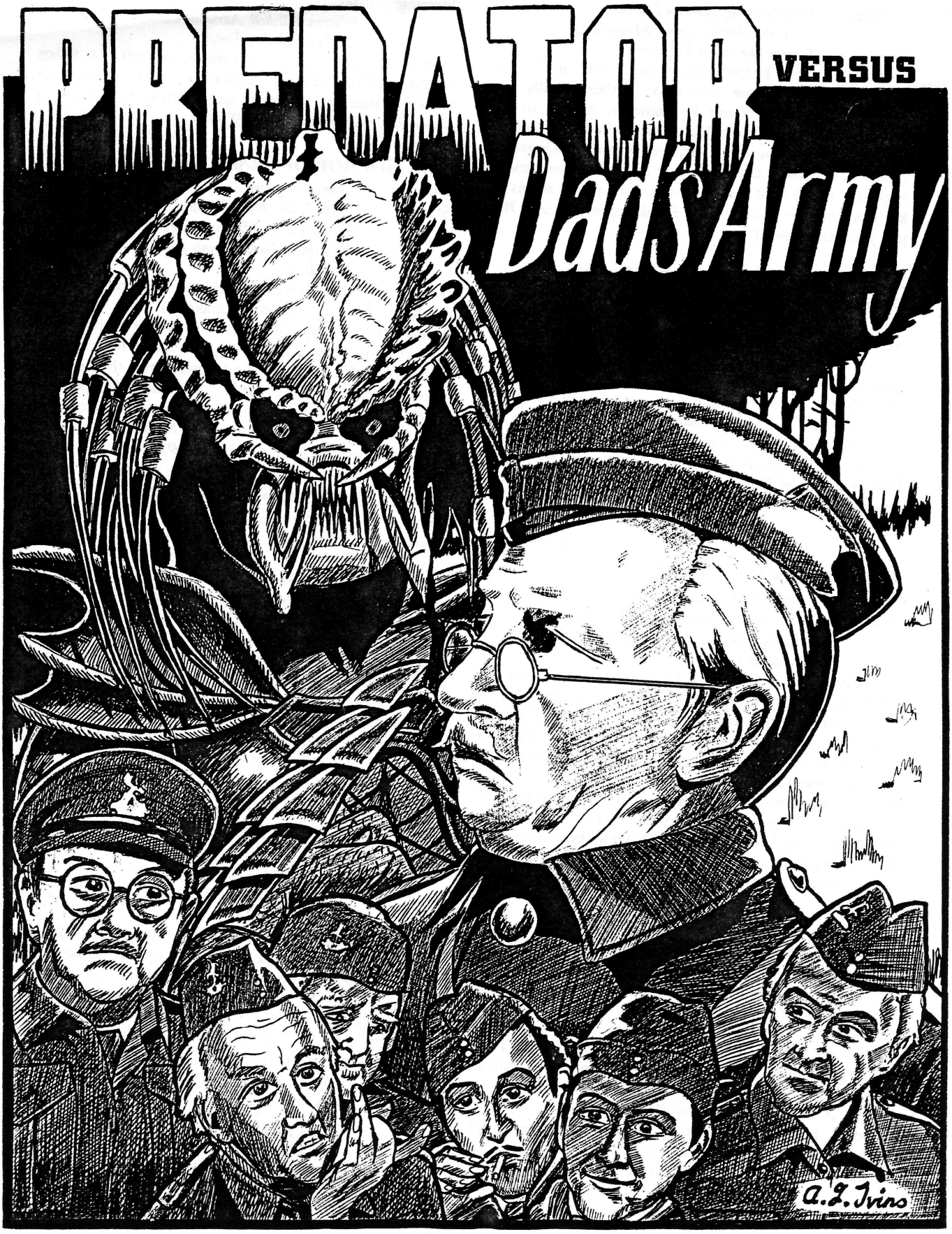
I rushed out of the pub, but the stranger was gone.

THE END

In Memory of

Arthur Lowe,
John Le Mesurier,
James Beck,
Arnold Ridley OBE,
John Laurie
& Edward Sinclair

"This was their finest hour . . ."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